



Journal of the Short Story in English

Les Cahiers de la nouvelle

29 | Autumn 1997

Other places, other selves

Forewords

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Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/236>

ISSN : 1969-6108

Éditeur

Presses universitaires d'Angers

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 1 septembre 1997

ISSN : 0294-04442

Référence électronique

Linda Collinge et Emmanuel Vernadakis, « Forewords », *Journal of the Short Story in English* [En ligne], 29 | Autumn 1997, mis en ligne le 08 juillet 2008, consulté le 22 avril 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/236>

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Forewords

Linda Collinge et Emmanuel Vernadakis

- 1 The current issue contains the Proceedings from the "Other Places, Other Selves ?" colloquium held in Angers in January 1997. The colloquium chose to concentrate on a particular aspect of the short story - the setting. Though Eudora Welty for example in her collected essays *The Eye of the Story* considers place to be "one of the lesser angels that watch over the racing hand of fiction" (in relation to character or plot for example), the colloquium speakers effectively confirmed that in the analysis of the short story "an other place" can be a useful criterion not only in the understanding of setting but also in the elucidation of character.
- 2 Many short stories have been set in *other places*, places that are not, or are no longer, home to the writer. Writers' motives for such a choice are numerous and in the process of changing location, he or she may become, search for or manifest an *other self*. The articles in the present issue, selected from the colloquium, explore those motives and the effects brought about by the choice of setting the short story in another place. They describe how the authors deal with such subjects as otherness, identity, alienation, cultural or sexual differences and representations of race.
- 3 The approaches to answering the question posed by the colloquium are diverse, but all of the articles consider a few basic points that make up the core of the subject at hand. They define what the "other place" is for the author they're dealing with: a place he has lived in, has visited, has never been to but has only imagined, a place of exile, a home to which the expatriate has returned.
- 4 They also study the author's attitude or feeling toward this place: attraction, disdain, alienation, a desire to integrate, a desire to remain an outsider, an imperialist attitude, use of the place as a mask to better reveal the truth or as a catalyst for self-revelation.
- 5 The articles appear in the approximate chronological order of their subjects, beginning with the study of Aphra Behn's 1688 short narrative *Oroonoko* and ending with two stories by Jane Urquhart written in the 1980's. They could also, however, be classified according to the manner in which the "other place" is considered by the author. The broad categories would be home, exile, self-revelatory and exotic.

- 6 In their respective articles, Claude Forray, Thorunn Lonsdale and Sonya Domergue concentrate on the expatriated character's need to return to his or her place of origin in order to resolve questions of identity. Spencer Brydon returns to his house on the jolly corner in search of his alter ego in Henry James's "The Jolly Corner". The unnamed character in the very brief story "I Used to Live Here Once" by Jean Rhys risks a return to her birthplace, and Shaila Bhawe, in "The Management of Grief" by Bharati Mukherjee, returns to her home in India to recast her identity after the tragic loss of her family.
- 7 Exile frequently accompanied by alienation is the subject of articles by Pamela Dunbar, Thorunn Lonsdale (in part) and Leonora Villegas Obed. Though not himself an exile literally, Katherine Mansfield's Raoul Duquette in "Je Ne Parle Pas Français" is a metaphorical exile living a rootless existence. Jean Rhys's Selina Davis, an uprooted, marginalised and exploited Caribbean woman living in England, resigns herself to "letting them call it jazz", that vivid expression of her identity, and laments: "I come so far I lose myself on that journey". Anna, the protagonist of Rhys's "Mannequin", doesn't suffer from the same alienation, though she is subject to commodification as a young English model in Paris. As an Irishman living in England, Wilde, to quote Leonora Obed, "became an Outsider who used alienation as a means of being able to view situations with greater sensitivity."
- 8 Georges Letissier and Theoharis Theoharis respectively see the "other place" as a catalyst for self-revelation in Jane Urquhart's "Italian Postcards" and "John's Cottage" and in Tennessee Williams's novella *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*. Urquhart's Clara discovers an unhealed wound while visiting Assisi and the unnamed narratress of "John's Cottage" discovers a capacity for independence during a stay in northern England. Retirement takes Williams's Mrs. Stone, a former actress, to Rome where "she passes through existential crisis to authenticity".
- 9 Aphra Behn and Somerset Maugham, though separated in time by more than two centuries, have in common their English origins and their role as colonizer, contrary to the other writers considered in this issue. Andrew Hiscock and Glenn Hooper study the ideologies and attitudes of their writers who perceive colonial life and its influence on the self from the position of the dominant culture.
- 10 The proceedings of the colloquium which make up this issue also include excerpts from the round table which featured three guest writers: Mavis Gallant, David Madden and Louis de Bernières. Prior to the round table discussion, each of the writers read one of their short stories. Thus we heard Mavis Gallant read "Kingdom Come", David Madden an excerpt from "The Singer", and Louis de Bernières "Stupid Gringo", an unpublished story which he kindly agreed to publish in this issue. We would like to sincerely thank these guest writers who so generously accepted our invitation.
- 11 We would like to thank the British Council in Paris for funding Louis de Bernières' trip to and from Angers.
- 12 We would also like to thank those who participated in the organization of the colloquium and the publication of this issue - Yvonne Buchmann, for her precious step-by-step collaboration, Sylvie Esnault for her incredible efficiency and Catherine Jannin for her meticulous transcription of the round table.